674 AN

ACCOUNT OF THE CONVERSION

OF THE

REV. JOHN THAYER,

LATELY A PROTESTANT MINISTER AT BOSTON IN NORTH-AMERICA,

Who embraced the Roman Catholic Religion at Rome, on the 25th of May, 1783.

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A LETTER TO HIS BROTHER,

In Anſwer to ſome Objections.

Miſericordias Domini in æternum cantabo.
I will ſing the Mercies of the Lord for ever.
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BRITISH
MUSEUM

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REV. JOHN THAYER.

THE Public Papers have already announced the converſion of a Proteſtant Miniſter wrought at Rome, at the time of the miracles of Venerable Labre. I am that Proteſtant converted to the faith: and being led to it by a very ſpecial providence, like the blind man in the goſpel, miraculouſly healed, it gives me pleaſure, and I think it my duty, to publiſh the mercies of a bountiful God, to whom I am indebted for the light and life of grace. Both my converſion and my ſolemn abjuration at Rome, were public. Paſſing afterwards into France, I related my ſtory, or rather that of Divine Providence in my regard, to a great number of reſpectable perſons, who wiſhed to learn the particulars of it. I was afterwards ſtrongly ſolicited by ſome friends to ſend it to the preſs for the edification of Chriſtians, and for the greater glory of God. Yielding to their reaſons,

and their aurhority, I now, *by their advice*, give it both in Engliſh and French*, in favour of thoſe who only underſtand one of thoſe languages.

I was born at Boſton, of a family in eaſy circumſtances. I was brought up there in the Proteſtant religion, the only prevailing and almoſt the only known in New England. At firſt I had refuſed to ſtudy, but at the age of ſixteen, by reflection, and a certain deſire of improvement, I entreated my parents to put me to ſchool. By dint of application, I repaired loſt time, and by the help of a good teacher, made a tolerable rapid progreſs. At the concluſion of my ſtudies, I was made a Miniſter of the Puritan ſect, and exerciſed my functions for two years, applying myſelf to the ſtudy of the Holy Scripture, and to preaching. In the mean time, I felt a ſecret inclination to travel ; I nouriſhed the deſire, and formed a reſolution of paſſing into Europe, to learn the languages which are moſt in uſe, and to acquire a knowledge of the conſtitution of ſtates, of the manners, cuſtoms, laws and government of the principal nations, in order to acquire, by this political knowledge, a greater conſequence in my own country, and thus to become more uſeful to it. Such were my human views, without the leaſt ſuſpicion of the ſecret deſigns of Providence, which was preparing for me more precious advantages. I embarked for Europe, and arrived in France at the end of the year 1781. I remained there ten months, totally taken up in ſtudying the language, in reading the beſt authors, and inſtructing myſelf in the principles of the government : I was there attacked with a fit of illneſs, and as I feared that it might be attended with ſerious conſequences, my firſt concern was to forbid

* It is publiſhed in French at Paris.

that any Catholic Prieſt ſhould be ſuffered to come near me; ſuch was my attachment to my own ſect. After my recovery, I ſpent three months in England, attentive as in France, in obſerving the manners and cuſtoms of the country. I was deſired to preach; I complied, but it being obſerved that my doctrine did not agree with that of the perſons before whom I ſpoke, I replied that I had taken it from the goſpel. It is on this that all the ſects, however oppoſite to each other, eſtabliſh their various ſyſtems; a ſtriking proof of the neceſſity of a living authority to fix its true ſenſe!—I returned to France, with an intention of paſſing from thence to Rome, conſtantly bent on the ſame purſuits; and as it may be eaſily imagined, ſtrongly prejudiced both againſt the nation and the religion of that country, which had been repreſented to me in the moſt odious colours. However, during my ſtay in France, I had formed a leſs unfavourable idea of the catholic religion, and my intercourſe with the Italians contributed alſo to remove my prejudices againſt them. In our paſſage from Marſeilles to Rome, we were becalmed, and obliged to ſtop ſome days at a little port called *Port Ercole*. The Marquis D'Elmoro, a reſpectable old gentleman, received me without any recommendation to him, and treated me with the kindneſs and affection of a father: his houſe, his table, his library were at my ſervice, and when we parted, he made me promiſe to correſpond with him. I had the happineſs, wherever I went, to meet with Italians of the ſame character, and all with whom I have been concerned have ſhewn the ſame eagerneſs to oblige me, eſpecially the worthy and virtuous family in which I lodged at Rome, and in which I found myſelf as in the centre of my own family. Such goodneſs, ſuch cordiality to a ſtranger, to an avowed Proteſtant,

at once touched and ſurpriſed me. This religion, ſaid I, is not then ſo unſociable, and does not, as I have been told, inſpire ſentiments of averſion and intolerancy to thoſe of a different perſuaſion. Thus, from day to day, I condemned the unjuſt prejudices which had been ſuggeſted to me, and God diſpoſed matters at a diſtance to bring me inſenſibly to the happy term at which I am arrived. My firſt concern at Rome, was to viſit the moſt celebrated maſter-pieces and monuments of antiquity, which attract the notice of ſtrangers; among others, the Rotunda or Pantheon, a temple formerly conſecrated to the worſhip of all the falſe deities of paganiſm, but at preſent dedicated to the honour of the Bleſſed Virgin, and of all the Saints. At the ſight of this ſuperb edifice, I was ſtruck with an idea which appeared to me ſublime, and which I thought might furniſh the ſubject of an elegant diſcourſe, if the Catholic Religon were true. The following is, in ſubſtance, the idea which occurred to me at that time. "This "temple, formerly conſecrated to the worſhip of "falſe gods, now become the temple of the true "God; the croſs of Jeſus Chriſt raiſed on the "wrecks of all the idols, collected to form for it, "as it were, a more glorious trophy, and from "thence exhibited to the whole world; this city, "formerly the miſtreſs of the univerſe, and the "capital of the Pagan world, now become the "capital of the Chriſtian world; theſe, I ſay, are "living and laſting monuments of the triumphs of "Jeſus Chriſt over the *ſtrong-armed*, and of the "eſtabliſhment of his empire upon the ruins of "that of Satan. Yes; it was worthy of God, to "make the centre of idolatry the centre of the "true faith; the firſt city in the world, the capi-"tal of his kingdom; in ſhort, this famous ſchool "of all arts, this celebrated city, which draws "the attention of the curious and ſtrangers from

" all parts of the world, the ſchool of truth, and " the common centre of union among all thoſe " who believe in Jeſus Chriſt; then nothing " would be wanting to the exterior glory of " his Religion, and to the viſibility of his Church, " which he undoubtedly intended to exhibit to " the eyes of all mankind, it would then be truly " a *city built upon a mountain*, ſo expoſed to the " ſight of all the world, that it could not be con- " cealed." This idea pleaſed me much, and as I was fond of the eloquence of the pulpit, I wiſhed it were true, to be able to treat ſo beautiful a ſubject. This firſt ray of light ſhould have led me farther; but, as yet, it was no more in my eyes than a pleaſing fancy, which I relinquiſhed to attend to the pupoſes I had formed.

I learned Italian much ſooner, and with much more facility, than French; and in a ſhort time was able to read the beſt authors in that language. According to my intention, I ſtudied at the ſame time, the conſtitution and actual ſtate of Rome. From time to time, however, the Catholic Religion returned to my mind; and although it made no part of my plan of ſtudies, I was deſirous nevertheleſs of inſtructing myſelf thoroughly in its principles during my ſtay in that city; for the ſame reaſon that I ſhould have wiſhed to know the religion of Mahomet, had I been at Conſtantinople. I was far from ſuſpecting that my own was falſe, or at leaſt from thinking of embracing another; I only wiſhed to know the doctrine of Catholics from their own mouths, that I might not impute to them what they did not avow themſelves. In this deſign I addreſſed myſelf to ſeveral Eccleſiaſtics, and according to my cuſtom of adapting my converſation to each one's profeſſion, I entered on the topic of religion; but they had more piety than light, and ſeeing me a determined Pro-

teſtant, they condemned me without informing me, and we parted equally diſcontented; they with my attachment to errors, and I with their zeal, which did not appear to be according to knowledge. On the whole, my only intention was to learn their opinions, not to be diſpoſſeſſed of my own; and I thought of nothing more than to ſatisfy my curioſity; but thanks to that admirable Providence, which made all conduce to my good; as the deſire of travelling had led me to the centre of light, without my knowledge, ſo the deſire of inſtructing myſelf, brought me to the truth without my intention. After having often ſought for an opportunity of converſing with ſome perſon well informed, both able and willing to inſtruct me thoroughly in the Catholic doctrine, I met with two Eccleſiaſtics in a place which I was accuſtomed to frequent. I entered into converſation with them, and declared who I was, and what I wanted. At that time I thought with reſpect to the Jeſuits, as all other Proteſtants do; but yet, I told them I ſhould be glad to form an acquaintance with ſome of them. I know, ſaid I, that they are cunning, deſigning men, but they are celebrated for their learning; and while I profit by their lights, I will carefully guard myſelf againſt their ſubtilty. The two perſons with whom I was then converſing were of the Society of Jeſus: my frankneſs did not diſpleaſe them; they declared themſelves for what they were, adding, that they would not undertake to give me the inſtructions I deſired, but would refer me to an able man, who could ſatisfy my enquiries. In effect, they introduced me to one of their brethren, who was well known in Rome, and much diſtinguiſhed for his learning and piety. "Sir," ſaid I, when introduced to the Gentleman, "I may poſſibly have conceived ſome falſe

" notions of your religion, as all the knowledge " I have of it is taken from the report of its ene- " mies; if this be the caſe, I wiſh to be unde- " ceived, for I would not entertain a prejudice " againſt any perſon, not even againſt the devil. " Yet do not think of converting me, for cer- " tainly you will not ſucceed." This blunt introduction did not prevent him from receiving me with a gentleneſs and affability, which could only be the effect of true charity. He conſented to have ſome conferences on religion. At firſt he expoſed in order all the articles of the Catholic doctrine; which expoſition laſted ſome days. I liſtened with attention, and without interrupting him; but on my return home never failed to ſet down in writing the difficulties and arguments which ſeemed to combat each one of theſe dogmas and articles. Though many difficulties occurred to my mind, I could not but remark a wonderful harmony through the whole ſyſtem of the Catholic Religion, and a wiſdom which ſeemed to have ſomething divine. When he had finiſhed his expoſition, I propoſed in my turn my difficulties and doubts; and we ſpent above three months in diſcuſſing theſe articles. I was oftentimes at a loſs for a reply, becauſe I was candid in the diſcuſſion, and ſincerely meant to inſtruct myſelf, and not to cavil: yet many obſcurities and embarraſſments ſtill remained, which I was anxious to remove; and as this reſpectable man could only give me a few leiſure hours, and at intervals, to fill up the vacant time between our conferences, I had recourſe to another Jeſuit, who had not leſs zeal or leſs knowledge. He began with me in a manner which ſurpriſed me. " We will not," ſaid he, " enter on this ſubject at preſent: go, ſay the " Lord's prayer thrice, and return to me on ſuch " a day." I could not refrain from ſmiling at the

ſingularity of this reception, and replied, "I am "not yet a member of your Church, and already "you impoſe on me a penance." We parted: but reflecting afterwards, that prayer, far from miſleading, muſt be of real ſervice to me, and that a religion which teaches to begin by prayer an enquiry into its tenets, muſt be confident that they are eſtabliſhed on ſolid proofs, I complied with what he had preſcribed, and met him on the day appointed. I was already acquainted with the Catholic doctrine; he had nothing more to do than to clear up thoſe points, concerning which I ſtill had my doubts. As I propoſed my difficulties on each of theſe heads, he pointed out the paſſages in the beſt theologians and controvertiſts, where they are treated at large; he procured me their works, and I read them with attention. I had an opportunity of examining thoroughly each one of the articles conteſted between Proteſtants and Catholics, and of weighing the reaſons which the latter alledge to ſupport their ſentiments. I derived likewiſe much help from an Auguſtinian Friar, to whom I addreſſed myſelf at the ſame time; he took particular pains to ſhew me the difference which Catholics make between articles of faith and ſimple opinions, which the Church permits to be treated in ſchools, without either adopting or rejecting them. This diſtinction threw a light on the ſubject, and contributed greatly to put clearneſs in my ideas: for Proteſtants, by blending theſe two objects, are accuſtomed to create confuſion in the whole ſyſtem. There is a perfect unity of faith among Catholics; it is true that there are different opinions on many undecided points. It is from mixing together theſe two things, which are ſo widely different, that our adverſaries take occaſion to attribute to our faith what only belongs to free and indifferent

opinions. The care which I thus took to consult several doctors, proved doubly useful to me: for at the same time that I profited of the lights of each of them, I had an opportunity to remark that they agreed perfectly in matters of faith; which indeed must be one, as truth is one. This uniformity, which has subsisted among Catholics through all ages, made a lively impression on me, because I had never discovered it among Protestants. I had been connected with the heads of our sects; I had often conversed with them; I knew their sentiments; there were not two among them who agreed in the most essential articles: what is more, there was not one who had not varied in his doctrine. I recollect that one of our most celebrated preachers once made the same declaration to me. "When I preached in such a place," said he, "I passed for heterodox; I was so at that time, "for I had very erroneous sentiments: but I "have changed since, and were I to preach there "at present, my doctrine would be judged pure "and orthodox: but this is common to all our "preachers; I do not know one who has not, like "myself, varied in his doctrine." This declaration made no impression on me at the time he was speaking; but it has occurred since, and has given rise to many reflections. Another proof which verifies the common saying, That good or evil principles imbibed in youth produce sooner or later their effect. This instability of our leading men in their doctrine caused me much pain. I saw that it was an inevitable consequence of the fundamental principles of Protestants, which constitutes each one the judge of his own belief. By this principle there can be no fixed rule of faith. It is this which causes the eternal contradiction of ministers among themselves, and the frequent variations of each of them in their doctrine. I

had endeavoured to conciliate their ſyſtems together, but could find no other way, than by ſuppoſing it ſufficed to believe in Jeſus Chriſt, and to intend to honour God; but I ſoon found that this method, with which I was much pleaſed, tended equally to reconcile the moſt oppoſite and monſtrous ſects; I conſequently, from day to day, gave myſelf greater ſcope, and fixed no bounds to the liberty of thinking. I had friends among the Quakers, the Anabaptiſts, the Arminians and others, and in a ſhort time I ſhould have adopted a ſyſtem of toleration in its greateſt extent. Proteſtants vainly pretend that they admit ſcripture for their rule of faith; ſince they acknowledge no living authority to determine its ſenſe; ſince each one is ſuffered to give it a private interpretation, it is impoſſible to convince them of error; and when the Socinian, for inſtance, ſays, that he cannot find in ſcripture a demonſtrative proof of the divinity of Jeſus Chriſt, no one has a right to require that he ſhould believe this dogma, or to condemn him becauſe he rejects it. This principle goes farther, and leads the man who reaſons juſtly, to an indifference to all religion, and ſaps the very foundation of chriſtianity, by eſtabliſhing the private judgment of each individual the ſupreme arbiter of his creed. This reflection, and a thouſand others, which occurred, had not, at that time, all the effect which they ought to have produced: however, in the end they did not a little contribute to open my eyes to the truth. My reſearches had already carried me much farther than I had deſigned: at firſt I had only intended to form an exact knowledge of the Catholic doctrine, and I was inſenſibly come to ſuch a ſtate, that I diſcovered nothing in it but what was reaſonable. When I began my enquiry, I had not the leaſt ſuſpicion that my own ſect was falſe; I

already found it deficient, and had my doubts, though I was very far from being determined to abandon it. The prejudices in which I had been educated had ſtill too much influence over my mind, and my heart was not yet diſpoſed to make the ſacrifice which this change required. I thought I had done a great deal by reſolving to take with me to America the beſt works of controverſy which had been written by Catholics, and to read them on my return, with a determination of then changing my religion, if after mature reflection I could not anſwer their arguments: for I was reſolved, whatever proof was brought againſt me, not to make my abjuration at Rome, for fear of taking a precipitate ſtep. Providence, ever watchful over me, did not ſuffer thoſe delays which might have been fatal, but ordered various events which haſtened my converſion. A work of Father Segnery on the Guardian Angel fell at that time into my hands. This pious belief, that each of us has a tutelar angel, the witneſs of all his actions, was not new to me; it had been inſpired into me from my infancy, but till then had had little or no influence on my conduct. The peruſal of this work renewed the impreſſions which had formerly been given me on this ſubject: I reflected on my paſt life; I reproached myſelf for having ſo often failed in the reſpect which I owed to my Guardian Angel, and I formed a reſolution to be careful in future to avoid every thing which could diſpleaſe him*. This attention to preſerve myſelf from ſin undoubtedly contributed to my

* One of the moſt ſolid and rational devotions is certainly that which reſpects the Angels, ſince it has for its foundation the immenſe benefits which we have in all times received from thoſe benevolent beings. But this devotion ought to be peculiarly tender towards thoſe who are appointed as our Guardians, and from whom we continually

converſion; at leaſt it removed an obſtacle to the grace which God was about to beſtow. Such was my ſituation, when the death of Venerable Labre, and the miracles which were ſaid to be obtained through his interceſſion, began to make a noiſe at Rome, and to become the ſubject of every converſation. Notwithſtanding the inſtructions which I had received, and the lights which I had acquired, I was noways diſpoſed to credit the public reports concerning this truly extraordinary perſon. Of all my prejudices againſt Catholics, the deepeſt rooted was a formal diſbelief of the miraculous facts which are ſaid to have happened among them. I had been brought up in this perſuaſion common to all Proteſtants; who never having been able to obtain the gift of miracles, like the fox in the fable, diſdain it, and deny its exiſtence. Not content with denying thoſe which were publiſhed at that time, I made them the ſubject of my raillery; and in the coffee-houſes paſſed ſome very unbecoming jeſts on the ſervants of God, with whoſe poverty and uncleanlineſs I was ſhocked; and on this head I went farther than any even of my Proteſtant friends. However, the number and weight of the evidences increaſing daily, I thought that it was my duty to examine the matter myſelf. I frequently converſed with the Confeſſor of the deceaſed, from whom I learnt a part of his life. I viſited four perſons, who were ſaid to have been miraculouſly cured; I was convinced by my own eyes of the ſtate in which they then were; I queſtioned them concerning the ſtate in which they had been; I informed myſelf of the

receive an infinity of temporal and ſpiritual favours.—This, therefore, after the devotion to Jeſus and his bleſſed Virgin-Mother, is what I moſt warmly inculcate on all my friends, particularly thoſe who are young, as an excellent preſervative againſt ſin, and as a means of advancing in virtue.

nature and continuance of the illneſs with which they had been attacked, and the circumſtances of their cures, which had been operated in an inſtant. I collected the evidences of thoſe to whom they were known, and after all theſe informations, made with the greateſt care, I was fully convinced that the reality of each one of theſe miracles was at leaſt as well proved as the moſt authentic facts. One of theſe perſons, a Nun in the Convent of St. Appollonia, had burſt a blood veſſel; ſhe daily grew weaker and weaker for the ſpace of eighteen months; and at laſt was ſo reduced that ſhe could bear no nouriſhment: ſhe invoked Venerable Labre; took, with a lively faith, a draught into which one of his relics had been dipped, and was cured in an inſtant: the ſame day ſhe went to choir with the reſt of the religious, eat without feeling any pain, and with eaſe performed the moſt painful offices of the Convent. This was atteſted by the Superior and ſix other Nuns of the ſame Community. I often ſaw the Nun who had been cured, ſpoke to her, and found her in perfect health and ſtrength. Not content with theſe proofs, I viſited the Phyſician who had attended her during the whole courſe of her illneſs: he confirmed all that the Community had ſaid, and added, that he was ready to take his oath on the Goſpel that the illneſs was naturally incurable. I continued to ſee the Nun during the reſt of my ſtay at Rome, that is, for about four months. I had time to convince myſelf that her cure was laſting, and at my departure I left her in perfect health*. Perſuaded that there was ſomething ſupernatural in theſe cures, I could not refrain

* When Mr. Thayer had publiſhed the firſt edition of this Narrative, a Miniſter of the Eſtabliſhed Church wrote to him that he was aſtoniſhed that he ſhould mention, in this enlightened age, the miraculous cure of a Nun. To

from turning my thoughts on myself, and from considering the risk I ran by remaining in my own sect. These reflections involved me in much perplexity; I can hardly express the violent state in which I then was. Truth appeared to me on every side; but it was combated by all the prejudices I had sucked in from my infancy. I felt all the force of the arguments which Catholics oppose to the Protestant doctrine; but I had not the courage to yield. I clearly saw that the Church of Rome is established on innumerable and unanswerable proofs, and that her replies to the reproaches of Protestants are solid and satisfactory; but I must abjure errors in which I had been brought up, and which I had preached to others: I was a Minister in my own sect, and I must renounce my state and

whom he answered: "Facts, Sir, are facts in an enlightened as well as in an ignorant age, and the proofs of facts which we have not seen ourselves are always the same; that is, human testimony. Observe, that in an enlightened age, such as ours, miraculous facts are with more difficulty imposed on the world, because of the facility of detecting their falsity. Yet at this time our Church proposes to the public an infinity of such facts, and *this* at Rome, the resort of the curious and inquisitive of all nations, Protestant and Catholic; Rome, where open and hardy discussion, even in the public coffee-houses, is as free as in any other part of the world; (for this I appeal to all Englishmen who have been on the spot;) and she defies the most scrutinizing critics to invalidate their truth. Such facts, Sir, are to be believed, or there is an end to all human testimony."

Since Protestants thus question the greatest possible human testimony on public and momentous facts, I am not at all surprised that one of your great men undertook to prove false all the miracles of the Gospel. He was at least more consistent than his brethren, for he thus reasoned:

The Roman Church boasts of miracles as great as those recorded in the Gospel, and proves them by numberless competent witnesses: We reject these; therefore to be consistent, we must also reject those of the Gospel, which *equally* lean on human testimony.

fortune; I was tenderly attached to my family, and I muſt incur their indignation: intereſts ſo dear kept me back: in a word, my underſtanding was convinced, but my heart was not changed. I was in theſe circumſtances, fluctuating and undetermined, when a little book, entitled *Manifeſto di un Cavalieri Chriſtiano convertito alla Religione Catholica*, (which it would be good to tranſlate into ſeveral languages, and to ſpread wherever there are Proteſtants), was put into my hands. The author gives an hiſtorical account of his converſion, and briefly diſcuſſes the points which are controverted between Catholics and Proteſtants. He places in the beginning a prayer which was communicated to him by a Catholic to invoke the light of the Holy Ghoſt, and which the reader perhaps will not be ſorry to ſee.

" Almighty and eternal God, Father of mercy, " Saviour of mankind, I humbly entreat thee by " thy ſovereign goodneſs, to enlighten my mind, " and to touch my heart, that by true faith, hope " and charity, I may live and die in the true re- " ligion of Jeſus Chriſt. I am ſure that as there is " but one true God, ſo there can be but one " faith, one religion, one way of ſalvation, and " that every other way which is oppoſite to this, " can only lead to endleſs miſery. It is this " faith, Oh my God, which I earneſtly deſire to " embrace, in order to ſave my ſoul. I proteſt " therefore before thy divine Majeſty, and I de- " clare by all thy divine attributes, that I will fol- " low that Religion which thou ſhalt ſhew me to " be true, and that I will abandon, at whatever " coſt, that in which I ſhall diſcover error and " falſehood. I do not deſerve, it is true, this " favour, on account of the greatneſs of my ſins, " for which I have a profound ſorrow, becauſe " they offend a God ſo good, ſo great, ſo holy,

" and worthy of my love ; but what I do not " deserve, I hope to obtain from thy infinite " mercy, and I conjure thee to grant through the " merits of the precious blood which was shed for " us poor sinners, by thy only begotten Son Jesus " Christ. *Amen.*"

When I received this book I had a secret presentiment that it would give me the finishing stroke, and it was with extreme difficulty that I could prevail on myself to peruse it. My soul was, as it were, rent by two contrary emotions. What combat, what assaults did I not at that time endure : I cast my eyes over the prayer, but could not prevail on myself to say it : I wished to be enlightened, yet feared to be too much so. My temporal interest, and a thousand other motives, crowded on my mind, and counterbalanced the salutary impressions of grace. At length the interest of eternal salvation prevailed : I threw myself on my knees, I excited myself to say the prayer with the greatest sincerity I was capable of, and the violent agitation of my soul, with the conflicts it had sustained, drew from me an abundance of tears. I began then to read the book, which is a short exposition on the principal proofs which establish the truth of the Catholic Religion. The whole of those different proofs which till then I had only viewed separately : so many rays of light, collected as it were into one centre, made a lively impression on my mind. Besides, I did not make the same resistance as formerly to the divine grace : God spoke to my heart at the same time that he enlightened my understanding, and gave me grace to surmount the obstacles which had hitherto retarded me. I had not entirely finished the book, when I exclaimed, " My God ! I promise to be- " come a Catholic." The same day I declared my intention to the family with which I lodged :

it gave them joy, for they were truly pious. I went in the evening to the coffee-houſe, where I imparted my change to all my Proteſtant friends; and to repair, as much as I could, the ſcandal which I had given, I defended the ſanctity of Venerable Labre, and declared that I had more proofs of the truth of his miracles, than I would require for any fact whatever. Moreover, not to be aſhamed of Jeſus Chriſt, I invited a great number of friends to be the witneſſes of my abjuration. Many lamented my weakneſs, others made a jeſt of it; but God, who called me to the faith, ſupported me, and I have a firm confidence that he will ſupport me to my laſt breath.

I muſt acknowledge, that before my abjuration I had ſtruggles for ſome time with my imagination reſpecting the worſhip of the Bleſſed Virgin and of the Saints. I had nevertheleſs been ſufficiently inſtructed on this article, and did not doubt, but that it was profitable to employ with the Son the interceſſion of his holy Mother; and that, far from doing him an injury, by honouring and loving her whom he had ſo tenderly loved himſelf, it was the mean of honouring him the more; yet my ancient prejudices returned, and diſturbed my mind in ſpite of myſelf. The reproach of idolatry, which I had heard a thouſand times brought againſt Catholics on this ſubject, ſtill alarmed me, though I knew it to be ill-founded. I reſembled thoſe perſons, who in their infancy having had their imagination ſtrongly impreſſed with the ridiculous ſtories of apparitions, at a riper age involuntarily ſhudder where the ſame ideas recur, in ſpite of their reaſon, which wholly diſowns them. I was obliged to offer violence to myſelf; and when I began to invoke the Bleſſed Virgin, I did it with trembling. I firſt addreſſed myſelf to God, proteſting that I had no other deſign than to honour

him, and that I desired to do it more perfectly by the intercession of his Blessed Mother, entreating him not to impute to me idolatrous intentions, which I disavowed with all my soul. Then addressing myself to the Blessed Virgin, "O tender "Mother," said I, "if it be lawful for me to "implore thy succour, help me in the miserable "state in which I am. It was through thee that "the Saviour came to us, it is through thee that "I desire to go to him. The Scriptures teach "me, that by thy means was wrought the first "miracle of the evangelical law in the order of "grace (the sanctification of St. John the Bap-"tist,) and the first in the order of nature (the "change of water into wine.) Here remains "another to be performed; do not refuse to em-"ploy thy credit. I do not deserve it: too long "have I not known thee; but now, though with "fear and trembling, I begin to address thee, "intercede for me with thy divine Son." Then returning to God, "O Lord," said I, "I im-"plore thy light; thou hast promised to listen to "those who invoke thee; I do it from the bottom "of my heart: thou art my witness that I seek "truth, at whatever expence: I cannot err in "addressing my supplications to thy Blessed "Mother: thou thyself wouldst be the cause of my "error."—Confidence and tranquillity were the fruits of this prayer. From that time I have always had recourse to the Blessed Virgin, and I am confident that I have received grace through her intercession: gratitude obliges me to make this acknowledgment. I endeavour to join in every institution which tends to her honour, and I have pledged myself, and study as much as can depend on me, to extend the devotion to this dear Mother of God.

A very natural reflection here occurs: Can God

ſuffer a perſon to be deceived in the choice of a Religion, when after exact watchfulneſs over his own conduct, after fervent prayer, after long and toilſome inveſtigation, he determines to embrace it, at the expence of all that is moſt dear to him upon earth,—family, ſtate, fortune, reputation? If this religion be falſe, may he not ſay with a celebrated divine, "Lord, it is thou who haſt "deceived me." This reflection will acquire a new degree of force, if I add the prodigious change which is made in me by my converſion. I heſitate to publiſh it; but I think it my duty ſo to do, in order to glorify the mercy of God, and to render homage to the Catholic Religion, which I have now the happineſs to profeſs. What difference between my preſent and my former ſtate! My thoughts, my taſte, my views are wholly changed; I do not know myſelf again. As ſoon as I had taken my determination, I renounced the profane ſtudies in which I had been hitherto employed; I left my books half read; I parted with thoſe which belonged to me. From that time my paſſions have had little influence over me; my projects of ambition and ſettlement in the world are entirely laid aſide: I have no pretenſions on earth: I take no pleaſure but in the things of God: I feel within my heart a peace which I had never known; not, as formerly, the deceitful ſecurity of a ſtifled conſcience, which preſumes on the mercy of God, without ſeeing the danger to which it is expoſed: it is the ſweet confidence of a child who finds himſelf within the arms of a Father, and has reaſon to hope that nothing can tear him from them, notwithſtanding the dangers with which he is ſurrounded. Yes, this Religion is adapted to the heart: however ſolid and powerful the proofs are which convince me that it is the true Religion of Jeſus Chriſt, the ſatisfaction, the

pure joy which accompanies it, is for me another kind of proof, not leſs perſuaſive. The truths which I had moſt difficulty in believing, are thoſe in which I now find the greateſt conſolation. The myſtery of the Euchariſt, which appeared to me ſo incredible, is become an ever flowing ſource of ſpiritual delight: Confeſſion, which I had conſidered as an inſupportable yoke, ſeems infinitely ſweet, by the tranquillity which it produces in the ſoul. Oh! if Proteſtants and unbelievers could taſte thoſe ſweets which are felt at the foot of the Altar, they would ſoon alter their ſentiments. Oh! that I could be heard by them all, I would cry out to them, "Taſte and ſee how ſweet "and good is the Lord to thoſe who ſerve him in "the holy ſociety, which he has formed himſelf, "and which he vivifies by his Spirit." This is the prevailing wiſh, this is the only deſire of my heart, to extend as much as lies in my power the dominion of the true faith, which is now my joy and comfort. I ambition nothing more; for this I deſire to return to my own country, in hopes, notwithſtanding my unworthineſs, to be the inſtrument of the converſion of my countrymen; and ſuch is my conviction of the truth of the Roman Catholic Church, and my gratitude for the ſignal grace of being called to the true faith, that I would willingly ſeal it with my blood, if God would grant me this favour, and I doubt not but he would enable me to do it. I entreat all thoſe who ſhall peruſe this narrative, to pray with fervour the Father of Lights, and the God of Mercies, to bleſs the deſigns of his unworthy ſervant, and to open an eaſy acceſs to the faith in my country, and to cauſe it to ſhoot forth and to fructify in a land in which it has never yet been profeſſed. Perhaps, and I dwell with pleaſure on the conſoling thought; perhaps, I ſay, he who

raiſes up and caſts down Empires as he pleaſes, who does all for the Elect, and for the intereſt of his Church, has only permitted and brought to an end the ſurpriſing Revolution * of which we have been witneſſes, in order to accompliſh ſome great deſign, and much more happy revolution in the order of grace. *Amen.*

AD MAJOREM DEI GLORIAM:

FOR GOD'S GREATEST GLORY.

London,
Aug. 24, 1787. } JOHN THAYER.

* The Independence of the Thirteen States of America.

MR. THAYER'S LETTER TO HIS BROTHER.

MY DEAR FRIEND AND BROTHER,

I RECEIVED with the greateſt pleaſure your letter by Mr. ——, in which I have the ſatisfaction to find, that the friendſhip and tenderneſs which you have had for me, from your earlieſt age, ſtill continues; be perſuaded that on my ſide it not only continues, but has acquired new force from time, abſence, and much more from the heavenly Religion that I have embraced, whoſe peculiar property is to perfect the moral virtues it finds in us.

After a tender effuſion of heart, you declare your ſorrow that I have embraced a religion (as far as you are acquainted with it) fraught with bigotry and ſuperſtition. You did well to add, my dear Brother, "as far as you are acquainted with it;" for, let me tell you, that it is almoſt entirely unknown to you. Surely nothing but the falſe repreſentations and calumnies of our enemies, who have diſguiſed what in itſelf is holy, reaſonable, and worthy of all your reſpect, has made you give to our religion the odious terms of bigotry and ſuperſtition. This your ignorance is however common to moſt Proteſtants (for I can ſuppoſe but few capable, by deliberate malice, of imputing to us what they know in conſcience to be falſe): I con-

feſs that I was entirely ſurpriſed myſelf, when I heard the expoſition of the Catholic Faith from the mouths of its profeſſors, becauſe I found it totally different from what I had been taught to conceive it. Believe me, my dear Brother, for I have no intereſt to deceive you, I deſire nothing ſo much as your ſalvation, and that of my dear relations, for which I would gladly ſuffer the cruelleſt death. This I declare before God, who ſees the ſincerity of my heart. Before you read my anſwer to your objections, I beg you to retire a minute in ſecret, and there heartily, and on your knees, ſolemnly promiſe God to renounce all your paſſions, and aſk his grace to avoid every thing your conſcience ſhews to be ſin; and then ſay the prayer, p. 17, in the Narrative. If ſuch be your diſpoſitions, and if you faithfully cultivate them, my anſwers, though ſhort, will leave no clouds in your mind; if you be not thus diſpoſed, you do not ſincerely ſeek the truth.

Your *firſt* objection, taken from the perſecutions that Catholics have excited againſt their enemies, only proves that there have ever been bad Catholics, who, under pretext of religion, have vented the malignity of their heart. Our religion, far from approving, highly condemns all ſuch Chriſtians, and knows no other inſtrument of defence than mildneſs, patience, and charity. There have been, and ſtill are, cruel and perſecuting Catholics, as there are alſo cruel Proteſtants; but neither the one nor the other are ſo in conſequence of their principles, but becauſe they deviate from them. We do not pretend that all Catholics are ſaints; we unhappily ſee the contrary, and it is this that afflicts all the good. This however I can aſſure you, after a vaſt acquaintance among Catholics of ſeveral different kingdoms, that I never yet ſaw a ſingle one expreſs any bitterneſs

or animoſities againſt Proteſtants; on the contrary, they pity them, and pray for them, as deluded and deceived. Examine whether ſuch be the ſentiments of your different ſects towards us, and even towards each other, and afterwards decide, who have a perſecuting ſpirit, we or you.

2. As we lay great ſtreſs on the unity of doctrine that ever has prevailed among Catholics, you think to weaken this our argument by oppoſing to us the unity that reigns among Mahometans. But let me tell you, that this unity of belief, which you attribute to them, is wholly imaginary; for, according to the beſt hiſtorians, the Mahometans are divided firſt into the two great ſects of Omar and Ali. Theſe laſt, who are called Schiites, form five principal ſects, which, like ſo many trees, ſhoot into ſeventy branches. Among all theſe different ſocieties there is a vaſt variety of belief. Some doubt of their religion, and are pure Deiſts; others admit the *metempſycoſis*; others abſolute predeſtination, &c. They give each other the titles of orthodox and heterodox, and carry their mutual hatred to ſuch an extremity, that in their pilgrimage to Mecca, they form ſo many bands apart, refuſing to pray together. There can be then no queſtion between us about Mahometan unity, but only about that of Proteſtants. Now I aſſert, that if you were all perfectly of the ſame opinion, this would be the work of chance, and not the conſequence of your principles. There is nothing in your fundamental principle that neceſſarily produces this unity; on the contrary, your principle, that "every one is "to examine for himſelf," muſt be naturally a ſource of diviſion: whereas the conſtitution of our Church is ſuch, that it is impoſſible there can be diviſion concerning articles of faith. Remark, I ſay, *concerning articles of faith;* for in matters

of opinion, each one is free to hold what he pleaſes: but as ſoon as the Church has decided, that ſuch a point belongs to the faith, all true Catholics, becauſe they hold her infallible, neceſſarily ſubmit to the deciſion. Thoſe that refuſe to ſubmit, by this very refuſal really ſeparate themſelves from the Church, ſince they thus renounce her fundamental principle, *i. e.* that ſhe is the "infallible baſis of truth." 1 Tim. iii. 15.

3. This individual unity of faith is evidently marked in Scripture, and was certainly Chriſt's intention in founding his Church. It is ſaid, Epheſ. iv. 4, 5. there is "one body and one ſpirit;" to animate it, "one Lord, one faith, "one baptiſm," *i. e.* our faith ought to be *one* in the ſame ſenſe as our Lord Jeſus Chriſt is *one*, *i. e.* ſtrictly and abſolutely ſo. Chriſt prays, John xvii. 20, 21. that thoſe who believe in him may be united in the faith in a manner reſembling, as far as poſſible, the union between the perſons of the Holy Trinity, and gives this union as the mark by which the world is to know that he received his miſſion from his Father; for without ſuch an unity of faith among the Diſciples, the world would never have believed that their Maſter was ſent from God. Perhaps you ſuppoſe that Chriſt there only prays for union of hearts, and gives the union formed by mutual charity as the diſtinguiſhing mark of Chriſtians; but even this explication demonſtrates the neceſſity of ſameneſs of faith, ſince nothing ſo much deſtroys that charity, as difference in religion: witneſs the wars that have taken place in the world on this account, and the coldneſs with which different ſects ever regard each other. Our Church alone can pretend to this *unity*: which of itſelf ſuffices to convince the unprejudiced, that ſhe alone is Chriſt's Spouſe; yet we do not pretend to aſſign this as the

only note to distinguish her: there are three others marked in the Creed, which you admit as well as we, viz. *holiness*, *apostolicity*, and *catholicity*. Examine whether all or any of these marks belong to your sects.

4. Observe that all the Fathers of the Church had our idea of the necessity of unity of faith in Christ's Church: you as well as we regard them as Saints; and certainly by their nearness to Christ's and his Apostles' times, they must have known their mind. I could cite volumes of texts from their works to prove this, as well as the other articles of our faith; but the bounds of a letter forbid.

5. What seems to give you the most pain in our doctrine is, the *infallibility* which we attribute to our Church. A simple explication of this point must remove, I think, whatever it has alarming. Observe *first*, that we attribute this infallibility to the whole Church, *i. e.* to the majority of the Bishops joined to the Pope alone. If some particular divines regard the Pope alone as infallible, this their opinion cannot be justly imputed to the whole Church, which had never defined any such thing. But in order to put our doctrine of infallibility in a clear light, let us recur to that moment, when Christ revealed "all truth" to his Apostles, and established them, and the Pastors their successors, as depositaries of these truths. This body of Pastors, thus established, have, in all ages, declared every rising novelty to be contrary to the sacred deposit committed to them by Christ: thus when Arius denied the divinity of Christ, the Church condemned him, and declared, that she had received the contrary: thus when Pelagius denied original sin, the Church declared his doctrine contrary to her deposit, and brought baptism, which had ever been practised in her bosom, as a standing proof

of our corrupt origin. Her infallibility conſiſts then in the public and perpetual teſtimony that ſhe ever renders to truths of fact. For what is the Chriſtian Religion, my dear Brother? It is a public fact. Whether Chriſt has exiſted, taught ſuch and ſuch doctrines, wrought ſuch miracles? Whether the Bible be written by ſuch and ſuch authors, &c.? All theſe points are matters of fact that have fallen under the ſenſes, and that can only be known by eye or ear witneſſes. The teaching Church, *i. e.* the majority of Biſhops united to the Pope, is this body of hereditary witneſſes: and you cannot ſurely refuſe her an infallibility, (*i. e.* a capacity of exactly relating facts) which you readily grant not only to whatever conſiderable ſociety, civil or religious; but even to individuals. When the Mahometans, who are compoſed of different nations, and conſequently of different intereſts, unanimouſly atteſt, that at ſuch a time they received ſuch a doctrine from Mahomet, no one of common ſenſe can diſpute a public fact of this nature. Why then ſhould you refuſe the teſtimony of the Catholic Church, that is compoſed of various nations directly oppoſite to their intereſts, and often at war; when all her Paſtors, as unanimouſly *at leaſt* as the Mahometans, declare, that they have received ſuch doctrines from Chriſt and the Apoſtles, and all agree in the expoſition of all the articles that belong to the faith, and deny that there has ever been the leaſt change in the Church? And how is it poſſible to ſuppoſe any change? There is in the firſt place a body of Paſtors, as we have ſaid, eſtabliſhed to prevent all innovations: the perpetual return of our holy days put continually before the eyes of the faithful our myſteries, many of which are, and ever have been, daily practiſed. For inſtance, Chriſtians ever communicated. Is it reaſonable, is it poſſi-

ble to ſuppoſe, that when their Paſtors preſented them what appeared to be bread, they did not aſk what they were to receive in this ſacrament, whether mere bread, or the real body of Chriſt? Chriſtians then, in all ages, muſt have known what they were to believe in ſo important a matter, eſpecially the nearer they were to the Apoſtles' times, when Paſtors were certainly exact to inſtruct their flock. Whatever you ſuppoſe to have been their faith in this point, it muſt have continued without any alteration: for if there had been the ſmalleſt change, the people, who are naturally turbulent, would have cried out in a matter ſo vaſtly important. If you ſay that they did ſo, but that it has not come to our ears; I anſwer, that this is truly ſtrange, ſince we have contemporary hiſtorians, that have recounted the minuteſt diſputes about words and letters, that have happened in every period of the Church (not excepting the times of the groſſeſt ignorance) and yet ſo eſſential a change as this they ſhould have paſſed in ſilence. How incredible!

6. Beſides, what intereſt could the Church have had to change her doctrine? How could all the different nations that compoſe it, have combined to make this change, ſince their intereſts are all different. If the French, for example, had attempted this change, would not the Engliſh have oppoſed them? And even if all her parts had united to form this change, would not heretics, who have at all times exiſted round about the Church, have reproached this alteration, and thus have tranſmitted it to poſterity? Form the ſame reaſoning for all the other articles of our faith, where you ſuſpect a change, as for this of the real preſence of Chriſt in the holy communion. Thus you ſee, my dear Friend, that common ſenſe forces us to receive the Church's teſtimony, when

ſhe declares that ſhe has received ſuch and ſuch truths from Chriſt and the Apoſtles, and that ſhe has conſerved them unaltered. Now when we are arrived to admit this teſtimony concerning what Chriſt and the Apoſtles delivered her, from that moment, if conſiſtent, we are Catholics; ſince all Chriſtians hold that what Chriſt and the Apoſtles taught is certainly true. This *moral infallibility*, which you are obliged to grant to the Church, as to all other great ſocieties, becomes *divine* in virtue of the promiſe of Chriſt, who has communicated to her his own immutability.

7. This ſecond ſort of *infallibility*, far ſuperior to the firſt, becauſe ſupernatural, appears in a ſtriking manner in the words of Chriſt to his Apoſtles: "Go forth, and teach, and behold I "am with you" (*i. e.* teaching) "until the end "of the world." Now a Church, that has Chriſt preſent while it teaches, muſt certainly be infallible; and this preſence is *ſurely* promiſed to the ſucceſſors of the Apoſtles, to whom the words, "until the world's end," muſt be applied, ſince the Apoſtles themſelves were all dead, except John, before the end of the firſt century. Again Chriſt promiſed his Apoſtles, John xiv. 16, 17. "the "Spirit of truth to remain with them for ever," *i. e.* to the end of the world. This text, for the ſame reaſon as the preceding, muſt alſo be applied to the Apoſtles' ſucceſſors, the paſtors and teachers of the Church; which, having thus for guide "the "Spirit of truth," muſt neceſſarily avoid all errors in faith, *i. e.* muſt be infallible. I was then founded on reaſon and Scripture, and not merely, as you ſay, "*on the legends of our Church*," when I ſaid, *that the Pope, with the majority of our Biſhops, are directed by the Spirit to decide what we are to believe*; for it is as public and inconteſtable a fact that the Pope is the ſucceſſor of St. Peter,

and that the other Biſhops are ſucceſſors of the other Apoſtles, as that Lewis XVI. is ſucceſſor of St. Lewis.

8. Again, all kinds of reaſons perſuade that Chriſt's Church ought to be infallible. Chriſt declares, "that he that hears her, hears himſelf:" he commands us to obey her, under pain of "being regarded as heathens." God ſurely cannot order us to obey one that is capable of teaching us damnable errors; otherwiſe he would be himſelf the author of them. Beſides, why did God eſtabliſh the Church? "In order," ſays St. Paul, Epheſ. iv. 24. "that we may not be toſſed to "and fro by every wind of doctrine;" *i. e.* that we may never be *in doubt* concerning what we ought to believe. But you Proteſtants, can you ever be free from doubts? This is impoſſible, ſince you have no infallible authority to ſettle them. However, a viſible and infallible authority, diſtinct from Scripture, (which is the law) is abſolutely neceſſary to decide the contentions that ariſe among Chriſtians. Where this authority is not admitted, there is no fixed rule, no invariable articles of faith. The proof of this is the increaſing multitude of ſects among you, which frequently end in Socinianiſm, Deiſm, &c. But what is the moſt palpable demonſtration of what I advance, is, the late alteration that thoſe of the Church of England among you have made in the articles of faith. What are articles of faith? They are eternal truths revealed by God, and founded on his veracity: as the divine veracity is unchangeable, the truths that depend on it muſt remain the ſame; for "heaven and earth will "paſs away before one of God's words ſhall "fail," and therefore it is not only abſurd, but impious to attempt to change them, ſince this

is making God a liar. Experience then proves, that you need an infallible judge.

9. Nor can you reply, that the Bible is this unerring judge; for the Bible is the law; it is a mute book, and the ſubject of diſpute: we need a ſovereign and viſible judge, to declare who is right and who is wrong. I repeat it, the Bible cannot be this judge: for without the deciſion of the Church, we muſt always have ſome of theſe doubts: 1. Whether the Bible itſelf be a canonical book, the production of the Holy Spirit. 2. Whether it be entire and unaltered. This ſecond doubt is reaſonably founded on the various readings of different manuſcripts. 3. Whether it be faithfully tranſlated: and 4. what is the moſt important, Whether we have aſcertained its true meaning. Amidſt ſo many doubts and incertitudes, where can be the certitude of faith? Yet our faith ought to be ſo firm and unſhaken, that we ſhould be ready, like the Martyrs, to die in its defence; otherwiſe we are unworthy of Chriſt, and of the name of Chriſtians. We Catholics can have none of theſe incertitudes, becauſe we ſubmit to the Church which we believe to be infallible.

10. Further, what evinces the neceſſity of an infallible Church is, that ſuch a one *alone* is adapted to the bulk of mankind. Is not God, according to St. Paul, "the Saviour of all men?" Does he not will and even ſhew the tendereſt ſolicitude for the ſalvation of children of the poor and ignorant. Are the poor artizans and labourers, who are continually occupied by the cares of life; and women, who do not apply to ſtudy: are they, I ſay, capable of that eternal diſcuſſion and examination which your principles demand? No; for this the longeſt life of the moſt learned would not ſuffice.

11. This article of the infallibility of the Church once eſtabliſhed, a Chriſtian's doubts immediately vaniſh; for if once ſure that God cannot permit the Church to deceive me, from that moment I am obliged in conſcience to receive all her deciſions, even in things that appear the moſt incredible to reaſon.

12. The firſt conſequence deducible from the Church's infallibility is, that ſhe has never erred, and that Luther, Calvin, &c. who have pretended it, have made Chriſt a liar, who has declared, Matt. xvi. 18. "that the gates of hell ſhall not prevail againſt his Church." Now if error has infected her, the gates of hell have prevailed, and Chriſt has not fulfilled his promiſe.—The ſecond conſequence is, that all thoſe, that *knowingly* and *wilfully* follow thoſe pretending Reformers, are in evident danger of eternal ruin. Thoſe perſons can never give a ſatisfying anſwer to the following argument: In Luther and Calvin's time, either the Roman Church was Chriſt's true Spouſe, or ſome other ſociety was ſo; or elſe, Chriſt's true Church had ceaſed. If the Roman ſociety was at that time Chriſt's Church, no one could ſeparate from it without riſking his ſalvation, ſince there is no ſalvation for thoſe that are ſeparated from Chriſt: If any other ſociety was then Chriſt's true Church, they were obliged to join it under pain of damnation: If they ſay that Chriſt's Church had ceaſed, they make Chriſt a liar, who had promiſed its perpetual duration in ſpite of all the rage of earth and hell.

13. What I have ſaid on *infallibility*, will give you a juſt idea of what we mean by *tradition*, which the Proteſtants ſo greatly miſrepreſent. By this word we mean nothing elſe, than the *generally unanimous* and *conſtant teſtimony* of the Church of

all ages about the truths revealed by Chriſt, and taught by the Apoſtles.

14. To ſhew you the neceſſity of a ſupreme authority in the Church, in order to decide all conteſts that ariſe, I reminded you, that there was never yet in the world any ſtate which had not its high tribunal from which there is no appeal. This you allow to be neceſſary in all civil governments, to prevent anarchy and confuſion; but you add, "that there is no parity between civil "and religious ſocieties." I wiſh that you had pointed out the difference; for both are bodies of men, *i. e.* of beings governed by reaſon and paſſions: and taking men as they are, (for we are not ſpeaking of an imaginary order of things), there is no other means of forming any kind of ſociety, than that of authority and ſubmiſſion. Law and ſubordination are abſolutely neceſſary, without which there can be no union, and each will do what he pleaſes. All the individuals will be ſo many members ſeparated and diſperſed, that will no longer form a body. It is true, that eccleſiaſtical laws muſt be different from civil ones, in this ſenſe, that the one oblige the mind, and the other the body; the one impoſe ſpiritual pains, and the other corporal ones. The end propoſed by theſe two ſocieties is alſo different: that of the firſt, is the good of the ſoul; that of the ſecond, is the good of the body: but ſtill both are viſible ſocieties compoſed of men; and conſequently it is as abſurd to pretend to form a Church without impoſing laws on the mind, as to pretend to form a ſtate without impoſing laws on the body. This abſurdity is ſo manifeſt, that there has never yet been among you, or elſewhere, any eccleſiaſtical body, that has not impoſed ſome ſort of laws on the minds of its members. Why then

blame that which obliges to ſubmit our minds to the doctrine and deciſion of the Church.

15. You ſay, that "we are accountable to "none but God for our belief;" and intimate, that you think all religions equally conduct to ſalvation. This opinion is the neceſſary appendix to the Proteſtant principles. If the compaſs of a letter would permit, I would ſet fully before your eyes the horrid conſequences of this dreadful principle. I could demonſtrate, that it tends directly, not only to introduce all Chriſtian ſects, but Mahometaniſm, Deiſm, and even Atheiſm; and conſequently, that it tends to overturn entirely the Chriſtian Religion, which Chriſt has eſtabliſhed at the expence of all his blood. Is it poſſible that the Son of God could have deſcended from heaven to eſtabliſh ſuch an indifference of religion? Is it conſiſtent with the divine wiſdom of God to act thus entirely in vain? By this ſyſtem you accuſe the Apoſtles, the Apoſtolic men, and all the Martyrs, of the greateſt imaginable folly, for having ſuffered and died to eſtabliſh a religion that was uſeleſs, ſince men could be ſaved without it. Are not theſe few reflections capable of giving horror for this ſyſtem, to one that ſtill retains the ſmalleſt ſpark of faith, and reſpect for the goſpel of our adorable Jeſus? Conſider this horrible precipice on which you hang, and *that* in conſequence of Proteſtant principles, and ſhudder at your danger.

16. I now paſs to your other difficulties.—If you take literally the words, "Call no man Father," you muſt then conclude that it is a ſin to give this name to thoſe who, after God, are the authors of our being. Chriſt in that paſſage evidently ſpeaks of the ſupreme Father, ſince he a ds, "for one is "your Father in heaven;" that is, God, who according to St. Paul, is the Author of all Pa-

ternity. If any thing can be inferred from theſe words, it ſeems to me that it muſt be this: "Do "not quit the true Paſtors whom I eſtabliſh to "govern you, to follow innovators who become "fathers and authors of new ſects."

17. When St. Paul ſays, "We do not lord it "or domineer over your faith," he does not certainly pretend that it is lawful to examine and reject his deciſions, ſince he anathematizes even an angel that ſhould preach a doctrine different from his. Gal. i. 8, 9. If St. Paul had been a Proteſtant, he would have held a different language: "If any one announce to you a different doctrine "from mine, examine it without prejudices; "and if it appears truer than mine, embrace "it and reject mine." So far from this, he declares that its being different from his is a ſufficient reaſon for rejecting it. Is it poſſible to exerciſe a more abſolute authority (or, if you pleaſe, *domination*) over conſciences? The ſenſe of this paſſage muſt then be: "Though we exact "an abſolute ſubmiſſion, we do not domineer "over you, becauſe we are only the inſtruments "and organs that God employs to eſtabliſh his "juſt reign over your conſciences;" which certainly is not domination. Thus, when the Church demands our acceptance of her deciſions, ſhe does not domineer, becauſe ſhe does not act in her own name, but in that of Chriſt.

He does not domineer that uſes power received from lawful authority, unleſs he uſe it in a tyrannical manner. The Church is ſo far from this tyrannical exerciſe of her power, that, like a tender mother, ſhe conſults all the true needs of her children, and ſhe never puniſhes till after having tried in vain all mild means.

18. As to the Bereans, who are praiſed for ſearching the ſcripture, they were not as yet in the

Church. Not only do we permit examination to thoſe that are in the ſame ſtate; but we even preſs, exhort, and conjure them to examine.

But when we have once profeſſed the Church's infallibility, and entered her boſom, ſhe forbids, *not all examination*, but all that proceeds from *real* doubt. This her conduct is evidently juſt and wiſe, ſince all doubtful examination, after conviction that ſhe is infallible, is abſurd, and practically contradicts our profeſſion.

This your objection comes from your belief, that we lock up the bible from the hands of the people. It is true, that we are obliged in conſcience to explain it in the ſenſe of the Church: but this is not locking it up. Have lawyers ever pretended that the ſtudy of the laws was prohibited, becauſe they are obliged to explain them in the ſenſe generally received in the ſtate? Does a mother forbid the uſe of knives to her children, becauſe ſhe teaches ſo to employ them as to prevent their cutting themſelves?

19. Let me mention to you a ſtrong preſumption, that ours is the only true religion, viz. that it is the only one which inſpires the moſt heroic ſacrifices. I have ſeen, and often ſee, perſons of the firſt rank in life, delicate ladies, &c. renounce all the pleaſures, riches and honours of the world, and devote themſelves, ſome to ſerve the ſick and dying in infected hoſpitals, others to the moſt rigorous penance in convents. Among theſe laſt holds the firſt rank Madame Louiſa, aunt to the preſent King of France. She was the darling daughter of Louis XV. She quitted the moſt brilliant court of Europe in the vigour of life, and entered the order of the Carmelites, among whom are practiſed the moſt exceſſive auſterities. There ſhe performs the vileſt offices among the nuns her ſiſters; and all this to honour and imi-

tate the humility of her divine Maſter Jeſus, who, though Lord of all, "took on himſelf the form of "a ſlave, and became obedient even to the death "of the croſs." She has aſſured me with her own mouth, that ſhe never taſted, amidſt the pleaſures of the world, any of thoſe pure delights that ſhe now taſtes amidſt the poverty, obedience, and humiliation of a cloiſter.

20. Permit me alſo to add a word upon the catholicity, *i. e.* univerſality, of the Church. This attribute, which you admit in the Apoſtles' Creed as well as we, is expreſsly marked in the prophecies. See Gen. xxii. 18. Malac. i. 11. Pſal. ii. 8. Acts i. 8. This univerſal extent does not certainly agree to any other church except ours, which is ſo ſpread throughout all the *notable* parts of the world, that it cannot be hid from any ſincere ſearchers of truth. We have an infinity of biſhops and miſſionaries in the Eaſt-Indies. There are many millions of Catholics in China; and we have a ſpacious church within the bounds of the Imperial Palace at Pekin. It would be the greateſt folly to diſpute all theſe public facts, ſince we have here at Paris a ſeminary for the education of foreign miſſionaries, and another at Rome, called *Propaganda Fide*, where I myſelf have ſeen a vaſt number of youth from various nations, who are there ordained prieſts, and afterwards ſent home to preach to their friends and countrymen. We have here at preſent the only Son of the King of Cochin-China, who was conducted hither by one of the biſhops of that country.

21. If the reaſons, by which I have endeavoured to defend our religion, convince you of its truth, do not bluſh to own it openly and boldly. It is noble to confeſs and correct an error. Beſides, your error, if you do not make it

perſonal, by a wilful adherence to it after it is known to be ſuch, is rather the fault of your education than your's. Remember, that Chriſt threatens to renounce before the aſſembled univerſe, thoſe who refuſe to confeſs him before men.

22. O my dear Brother, would to God I could expreſs to you all the ſenſations that I have felt with reſpect to you and my family, ſince the hand of God has deigned to draw me from thoſe errors in which I was engaged, by birth and education! Your unhappineſs has ever been ſo ſtrongly impreſſed on my mind, that my prayers for you have been continual. I cannot think without ſhuddering, that if we continue ſeparated from each other in our belief, one of us muſt *neceſſarily** periſh for ever. Yet this is what I muſt conclude from comparing this text of St. Paul, "*One faith*," with that other of the ſame Apoſtle, "*Without faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe God*," and conſequently to be ſaved. There can be but one of us in the right, ſince our faith is entirely oppoſite. If it be you who are in error, as I am fully and intimately perſuaded, give me the ineffable conſolation of ſeeing you return to the boſom of the Roman Church, which *alone* is the *true ſpouſe* of Jeſus. United together in the arms of this tender mother, we will then uſe every means to obtain of God the converſion of him to whom we owe our being: yes, we will employ all our zeal to become in ſome ſort the fathers of our father, by procuring him a life infinitely more precious than that which we have received from him. This, my deareſt Brother and moſt cheriſhed Friend, is

* Mr. Thayer ſuppoſes there can be no place for *invincible ignorance* in his Brother, ſince he writes to him, as to one in ſome meaſure acquainted with the points which divide the Proteſtants from the Catholics.

what I desire with the greatest possible ardour. I conjure you by the bowels of the charity of our heavenly Father, and of his Son Jesus Christ, to think as seriously, as if at the eve of your death, on what I have written, and to beg God's light to guide you. Give this mark of tenderness and friendship to a brother, who lives only for you, for our father, relations and countrymen.—I am, with all possible cordiality and affection,

Your tender and loving Friend and Brother,

Paris, ——, 1787. J. THAYER.

MR. NATH. THAYER,
Queen-Street, Boston, in America.

POSTSCRIPT.—If you communicate this letter to any of your ministers (which I should wish) I beg you not to be content with whatever answers they give; but write them down, together with your own objections, and on reflection you will find the answer to all in the little that I have written. The more you read and meditate the bible, the more you will see the harmony and consistency of our principles, and the inconsistency and contradiction of those of your ministers. When I say, *the inconsistency and contradiction of the principles of your ministers*, I do not speak from any bitterness and animosity. If I were present among them, I trust they would soon see how sincerely I love them in Jesus Christ, and that neither passion nor party-spirit guides my pen; but the sole love of truth and the light of faith.

THE following Letter was ſent to Mr. THAYER, by a young Lady, whom he had received into the Church, and to whom he had given her firſt Communion. As it ſerves to ſhew the pure joys, and almoſt extatic delights that are taſted by thoſe who ſincerely return to the *only true Church of Chriſt*, he has thought proper to render it public. How aſtoniſhing is it that the Proteſtants will not *at leaſt* enquire into a Religion which is capable of inſpiring ſuch heroic ſentiments, and of affordiug ſuch real *happineſs*.

JESUS AND MARY.

SIR,

FOR your ſatisfaction, as well as my own, I look upon myſelf as indiſpenſably obliged to acknowledge by letter my many obligations to you, and the gratitude I feel, which will be laſting as life, as nothing can ever obliterate from my memory the graces, which, from you (as an inſtrument in God's hands), I have already received. Before I made abjuration, fear ſuggeſted, that I might have ſome after reflections that would probably make me repent being too precipitate in an affair of ſo great importance. Thoſe fears, I now plainly perceive, were only ſnares of the tempter; as the combats within are at this mo-

ment entirely ſubſided, and a perfect calm and ſweet ſerenity ſucceed, which leave me the power of making juſt reflections on the mercy and goodneſs of God, in bringing me to the knowledge of the Catholic Faith, while thouſands more worthy are left blinded by deluſion and error. His providence leaves me not with a bare knowledge of the truth; but is ſtill further extended by receiving me a member of the Church, and giving me a part in the communion of ſaints. Theſe heavenly mercies were all of them ratified in his giving me himſelf in the holy communion: but here I muſt he ſilent, loſt in admiration and love; for no tongue can expreſs, no pen deſcribe, the joys that in that divine ſacrament were conveyed to my ſoul. The more I contemplate, the more I admire and adore: no thanks can I render worthy of ſo ineſtimable a treaſure. I had often formed in my imagination, what muſt be the conſolation that the faithful experience when united with Jeſus; but how infinitely ſhort were my ideas of what I felt myſelf, when permitted to partake of that ſacred myſtery! Had I ſuffered all my life perſecutions and afflictions in ſupport of the faith, in that one moment they had all been more than amply repaid. O how I lament the impoſſibility of making the Proteſtants ſenſible of the loſſes they ſuſtain in being divided from the Church! Could they be but once brought to taſte the bleſſings conferred on its members, ſurely they would not heſitate a moment the abandoning of all for Chriſt. I am aſtoniſhed at myſelf at having ſo long retarded my happineſs, ſeeking among the creatures what the Creator alone could beſtow. It is not a little difficulty I find in keeping my ſentiments to myſelf: I long to make public profeſſion of my faith, that all my friends may know, that the Catholic Religion affords joys that never

could flow from ſuperſtitious worſhip: but though prudence at preſent keeps me ſilent, I have in the moſt ſolemn manner vowed, *ſupported by divine grace*, to make an entire renunciation of family, friends, and every other conſideration, rather than to deny my religion, or abandon the principles I have juſt embraced. I regard myſelf in a particular manner bound to ſupport and ſpread the everlaſting truths I have learned, and ſhall think myſelf peculiarly fortunate, ſhould I ever meet with a ſituation wherein I may mark my gratitude to God, by promoting the ſpiritual good of any of his creatures. I have likewiſe dedicated myſelf to the Holy Virgin, with an intention to repair, as far as lies in my power, the many years ſpent in a total neglect of her ſervice, as I am fully perſuaded of the great influence ſhe has with her Son, when interceding for us.

I have the honour to be,

SIR,

Your grateful Servant,

Aug. 26, 1787.

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The following ACCOUNT of two extraordinary CONVERSIONS, by particular deſire, are ſubjoined to this Edition of Mr. THAYER's Narrative.

Extract of a Letter from Paris, dated May 30, 1786.

IN caſe you have not heard the particulars of Miſs P***'s converſion, which is the ſubject of much diſcourſe, you may be glad to have the ſubſtance of what the Biſhop of Amiens wrote to Madame Louiſa, the Carmelite Prioreſs, and aunt to the preſent King of France. This Lady, who is nearly allied to ſeveral perſons of the higheſt diſtinction in England, was in her ſleep admoniſhed to go to France, where God called her to the true faith, and to dedicate herſelf to his holy ſervice in a monaſtery, which was ſhewn her, into which ſhe ſeemed to be conducted, and had the perfect knowledge given her of the Superior, every Nun, and every part of the houſe, particularly of the cell which ſhe was to inhabit. From the time of this viſion, ſhe became continually reſtleſs and uneaſy for the accompliſhment of it; and after ſome months ſhe obtained leave to go into France to perfect herſelf in the language. She had kept ſecret the real motive, and with ſome difficulty was permitted to take the journey. On the road ſomething failing in the coach and harneſs, ſhe was obliged to ſtop in the town of Abbeville ſome

hours, where ſhe dined; but impatient afterwards to purſue her journey, ſhe went to the door herſelf, enquiring how long they ſhould be detained; when looking on the other ſide of the ſtreet, ſhe ſaw the very building which had been repreſented to her in her ſleep. Struck with amazement, which was viſible to all preſent, ſhe then aſked with ſome eagerneſs, "What place that was?" They anſwered her, it was a Convent of Viſitation Nuns. She anſwered, ſhe muſt go thither directly; and underſtanding ſhe could not go in, ſomebody conducted her to the Turriere, and deſired the Superior to ſpeak with an Engliſh Lady in the gueſt parlour. As ſoon as the Superior opened the gate or lattice, Miſs P*** fainted away; when recovered, the Superior told her, ſhe was ſorry ſhe had been ſo ſhocked at ſeeing her. Miſs P*** anſwered, "I was not ſhocked at the ſight of you, Madam, but I knew you ſo well that it overpowered me." She told her ſhe muſt be miſtaken, for that ſhe had been in the convent from a child, and had never ſeen her: upon which Miſs P*** related her dream. The Grand Vicar was ſent for, who, upon hearing her account, ordered the convent doors to be opened, and conducted her to the gate. She knew every face as well as the Superior's, and every part of the houſe, which ſhe viſited with them: at laſt ſhe ſaid, "There is yet another place you have not taken me to, and I will take you thither:" it is a cell on the ſame floor with the Superior's. They followed her to it: it was an empty one: on her entering it, ſhe ſaid, "This is to be the place of my abode." And accordingly it is, being the only vacant cell they have. The Biſhop came as ſoon as appriſed of this extraordinary event; and very ſhortly after received her profeſſion of faith himſelf: ſhe is now in the white or novices veil.

—Let us admire the infinite goodneſs of God, who manifeſts his mercies ſo abundantly in theſe our days.

Extract of another Letter from Paris, dated June 28, 1786.

THE chief motive of my writing ſo ſoon was to impart a piece of news I heard this morning. A member and diſtinguiſhed lawyer, lately brought his daughter over to ſee France. The young lady ſhewed not the leaſt indication of being prepoſſeſſed in favour of our religion; but ſo far the reverſe, that in churches and proceſſions, &c. ſhe did not conform as moſt travellers of different religions commonly do. One day ſhe was alone in her room, about three weeks ſince; ſhe heard a little bell ring in the ſtreet, at which ſhe was ſeized all over with unſpeakable awe, and a trembling from head to foot; ſo that unable to ſtand any longer, as this bell rung ſeveral times again, ſhe flung herſelf upon the floor, laid flat on her face. In this poſture the ſervant of the houſe found her; and aſking her the reaſon, or if ſhe was ill, the young Lady aſked her what that bell was, which had paſſed lately through the ſtreet? She told her they always rung before the Bleſſed Sacrament, as the prieſt carried it to the ſick, that thoſe who heard might do honour to our Lord on their bended knees, or follow in proceſſion, if they pleaſed. She told how ſhe had been ſeized, and when her Papa came in related it to him, and begged ſhe might go to a Convent for a few days to know ſomething of the religion; in which he very kindly indulged her. At the end of theſe few days, he expecting her to return with him, went to ſee her. She aſſured him, ſhe was clearly convinced that the religion here profeſſed was the

only true and saving faith; and begged for God's sake, that he would give her leave to embrace it. He told her he should be sorry she left the Church she was brought up in; but that if he had fifty children come to the years of discretion, he would not controul them in their choice, if they thought in conscience they could change for the better. She then most earnestly entreated him to let her stay one month only in that Convent before she went home. He said he could not, as she knew he had promised so strongly to bring her back within that time; but her persuasions were still stronger than his promise; and at last he consented. She is now making the best of her time to co-operate with the grace of God, who so wonderfully called her to himself to adore and follow him.

There is scarce a week, for many months past, but I hear of abjurations in France. God increase them till the whole wandering flock return to the one Divine Pastor of souls, and be united in one faith under one head upon earth.

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